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SOVIET SAID TO GAIN ON ITS AFGHAN FOES

Russian Troops Reported to Quell Rebel Activities in Northeast

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NEW DELHI, March 29 — Soviet troops and equipment have virtually wiped out rebel activity in Afghanistan's Kunar Valley and in the northeastern Province of Badakshan, according to travelers.

The travelers said that after the battered and demoralized Afghan Army failed in repeated attempts to clear these areas of active guerrilla bands, Soviet commanders in Kabul ordered full-scale assaults using Soviet armor and rocket-firing MI-24 helicopters.

"These offensives last month proved that the Russians can go anywhere in the country if they go in full force," a traveler remarked. Another commented that overt resistance to the Soviet occupation died away in the capital after mass arrests last month in retaliation for a protest closing of shops.

The distribution of clandestine anti-Soviet leaflets, called night letters, has stopped. The last one turned up two weeks ago.

Despite the quiet in Kabul, there were ample signs that the Government of Babrak Karmal and its Soviet protectors were still facing serious challenges on many fronts.

Small Raids Throughout Nation

One traveler said that "mosquito-like raids" were being carried on daily in many parts of the country. Bridges are being expertly demolished, he said. Government convoys are being attacked. And 5-afghani coins, somewhat larger than an American quarter and worth about 2 cents, have disappeared. One explanation is that the coins are just the right size to fit into sections of pipe, sealing them to make grenades.

The travelers agreed that from what they had heard about the situation in military and civilian hospitals, various esti-

mates that about 1,500 Soviets soldiers have been killed since December seemed conservative.

A curfew is in effect in Kabul from 10:30 P.M. to 4:30 A.M. During the nights, checkpoints are manned by Soviet troops and tanks, though lately it is reported that well-dressed young men, presumed to be Afghan party functionaries, are in the streets with weapons.

In addition, neighborhood vigilante groups called Committees for Protection of the Revolution were established and armed three weeks ago, but they seem to have been disbanded. An Indian resident was shot and killed by such vigilantes some days ago.

Lack of Skilled Employees

The travelers, both Western and Asian, say that the thorniest problem facing the Afghan regime and the Soviet residents is a lack of skilled and loyal people to take over administration of Government services and the war.

One traveler said that of the 90,000 soldiers the Afghans reported were in the army, only 35,000 were still in the ranks. Of these he added, fewer than half could be considered loyal. Desertions and defections have taken a heavy toll and the officer corps has been further pared by successive purges. Young men from universities are reportedly being sent to the Soviet Union for hurried military training. But it is unlikely, the source said, that there will be enough trained Afghans to take over vital roles at any near date. He said that President Karmal had a Soviet driver, a Soviet bodyguard and a Soviet cook.

Soviet citizens in civilian dress, virtually all described as having a Slavic appearance, are reported to be working openly in most ministries. Russians are said to be running both The Kabul Times, an English-language paper, and the television station. Most other foreigners, those who worked for international agencies or for the former Afghan Government, have left.

American Speaks of C.I.A.

One American, Robert E. Lee, was shown on television Wednesday night. He was arrested Feb. 22 and, according to the Afghan press, was charged with "military espionage." On television he denounced the Central Intelligence Agency in a voice that was described as "strained." Mr. Lee has been described by people in Kabul as a wanderer who was trying to find employment as an English teacher. Another American, Charles Brockenier, a carpet dealer, was freed yesterday after more than a month in confinement.

In this period, the Kabul authorities have reported releasing 1,500 of the people seized in round-ups Feb. 21-22 in response to the shop closings. Many of those arrested were Hazaras, an ethnic and religious minority. They have Oriental features and are Shiite Muslims.

Along with a buildup of Soviet personnel, according to travelers' reports, there has also been a flow of arms and equipment. One man said he had seen all sorts of surface-to-air missiles, ranging from 3 feet in length to about 34 feet, mounted in tubes on trucks. An average of 20 Soviet transport planes arrive daily at the Kabul airport and at Bagram, 140 miles away. Heavy construction equipment, apparently brought by road from the Soviet Union, is being used to build what appears to some travelers to be a Soviet command post at the historic Bala Hissar Fort.